

Minnesota Democrat Advocates for Comprehensive Healthcare Benefits

Washington, D.C. – In observance of the Memorial Day holiday, Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) honored the nations' troops and veterans by calling on the country's leaders to fully fund affordable, quality medical benefits for the service men and women who volunteer to protect America.

"Our troops and veterans have served our country honorably during times of war and deserve the highest level of care and compensation," said Congresswoman McCollum. "I proudly support our troops, as I supported my father who served in the armed forces during World War II."

Health care funding is critical to those veterans returning with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury. There have been 1.6 million U.S. troops who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, sometimes serving three and four deployments. As many as 300,000 of these soldiers have returned home reporting PTSD.

"Investing in the recovery and development of our troops and veterans is an investment in the future of America. There should be no question that we must fund programs to provide full access to medical care for our nation's service men and women, including those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The Bush administration, however, has fallen short of the commitment to these courageous Americans. It was recently revealed that a veterans Affairs Department employee circulated an internal email discouraging diagnosing Veterans with PTSD, because they are eligible for health benefits.

"The cost of recovery is part of the cost of war. The service related disabilities of our troops and veterans are in most cases, for life – our commitment, in turn, must be for life," McCollum added.

Congresswoman McCollum, an auxiliary member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, has supported and co-sponsored several bills that address the health needs of veterans, including substance abuse, PTSD, suicide prevention and homelessness

prevention. She also voted for legislation creating a new GI Bill to restore full, four-year college education to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Earlier this year, Congresswoman McCollum visited American troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan to witness the tremendous sacrifice they make each day. She traveled to Iraq in October 2003, where she met with American soldiers and government officials. She has also visited Baghdad and Fallujah.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations Committee and the Government Reform Committee.